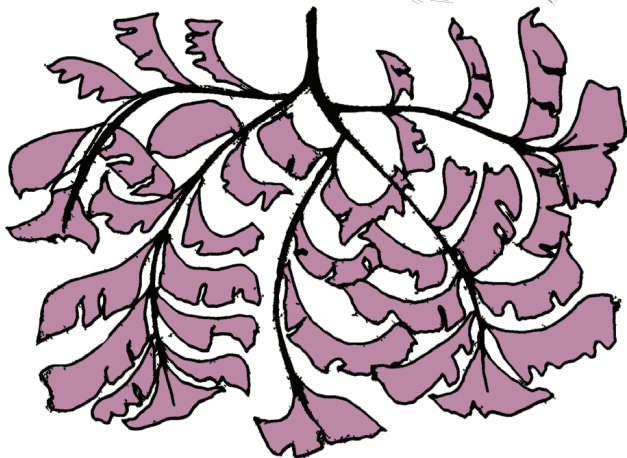


Locked

Up

**Alfredo M.
Bonanno**



elephant editions

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Translated by Jean Weir

Introduction

Prison has come out of the shadows into the limelight, as not a day passes without some allusion to “solving the problem” of the State’s overflowing dungeons. Advances in surveillance technology are offering alternative models of isolation and control that could see a large number of the latters’ potentially explosive inmates defused and—opportunistically tagged or microchipped—sent back to the urban ghettos of capital from whence they came. The main obstacle, bolstered by some retrograde attempts to gain votes through a sworn intractability concerning the “enemy within”, is power’s need for mass consensus from those it had led to believe that the State’s protection racket and promise of long custodial sentences were the ultimate social guarantee. The dilemma has given space to a whole range of social cops in an ongoing battle that the sycophantic media have not missed the



opportunity to illuminate. The occult world of prison never fails to provide good headlines for those in search of a frisson, “enlightened discussion”, or fodder for animated pub talk (the latter often concluding with a call for the reinstatement of the death penalty).

In actual fact, we are witnessing the labour pains of a transitional period concerning the whole question of sanctions and punishment in accordance with the requirements of post-industrial capital. The reality of enclosure, of being locked up in reinforced strongboxes for days, years, decades on end, is truly in contrast with the prevailing model of social democracy, which would prefer the perfect world of identity and participation also for those who accept the prison condition as their rightful penance.

And so once again, following the feminist issue, the work issue (flex-time, mobility), ecology, etc, we come to the point where the ever-adjusting requirements of power meet the solicitations



of the concerned left of the left, obsolete Stalinists, and renegade revolutionaries head on. Abolish prison! has become the slogan of the moment, backed up with myriads of tomes, specialist theses on prison conditions, and alternative accountancies of crime and retribution worthy of the fathers of the Inquisition.

Separation is the essence of politics, and by isolating prison from the State and capital as a whole, the harbingers of social surgery can find allies across the whole societal spectrum from priests to social workers, university professors to ex-cons. There is an answer for everything in the fantasy world of alternatives, every bad coin has its flip side.

But the totality of prison is not simply a place, it is also a condition, the antithesis of which is freedom. By the same token, the absence of freedom is prison and only when we perceive the latter as our own condition, realising that it is just a question of degree, will we be able to enter the



destructive dimension completely, without measure. Only if we combine empathy with projectuality, disgust for the institution and its putrid essence with hatred for the invisible shackles that bind us all, will we be capable of divesting ourselves of the viscid altruism that dams up the free-flowing energy of revolt. Prison is not a domain reserved for Specialists such as those who have done time themselves or have a particular rapport with individual prisoners, it is the underlying reality of everyday life, each and every discourse of capital taken to its logical conclusion.

The words that follow were spoken by a comrade in struggle, a struggle where prison has always been present both as a grim reality and an essential objective in the extensive destruction that “storming the heavens” implies. Little did he know as he wrote the introduction to the Italian publication of the transcription from Rebibbia prison in 1997, that a six year sentence awaited him as the outcome of the infamous Marini



trial. It should not go unsaid that, after being presented for public crucifixion as head of an in-existent armed gang, three of these years were for a “crime of opinion” (ie for the written word), the other three for an unsubstantiated accusation of involvement in a bank robbery. But that is not what we want to talk about here. Neither victim nor political prisoner, what follows are not the prison memoirs of Alfredo Bonanno, but a contribution by a comrade among comrades, a prisoner among prisoners, to a struggle that will continue until all prisons are destroyed and not one stone of them is left standing.

Perhaps the transcription of a meeting between comrades with its subtle tonal nuances, smiles, intensity, and laughter becomes monochrome and a little difficult to follow in the austere pages of a pamphlet. The tools of the writer were put aside in favour of the irrepeatable moment, the unique encounter of mind and spirit that occurs between comrades when they meet and talk face to face.



The discussion meanders from an immediate clarification that it will contain no vestiges of specialisation, to various anecdotes illustrating some personal recollections of life behind bars, to underlining precise tendencies in the evolution of punishment, etc, all linked by one guiding thread: the impelling need to destroy prisons along with the rest of the structures of capital. Nothing less will do. No concession to the pleasure of immediate gratification granted by success in single issue reforms. No taking refuge in complicated specialist inquests for the initiated. No negation of the individual in the name of “subsumption”.

Prisons are undeniably objective, material structures, but there are as many of them as there are prisoners, because like every other moment of life in society, prison is both a collective and a uniquely individual experience. One of the main themes of the discourse is the project of power that is already underway—and would be much more so were it not for the problem of



mass consensus that needs to be re-educated to accept new repressive trends—of separation between “irreducible” prisoners and the others, the ones that are willing to participate in their own “re-education” and re-insertion into the social marasmus. It is essential to grasp this concept. As science gradually takes over the task of social control from that previously carried out by law, a vast proportion of the prison population will be created as a result of behavioural misdemeanors (as opposed to conscious lawbreakers). The latter will tend to become a minority of irreducible outlaws who are not prepared to obey the rules of society, be they outside or within the prison walls. The great mass of prisoners will be oriented towards re-insertion through behaviour-modifying courses and alternative forms of control using all the paraphernalia on offer by a proliferation of technological gadgets, mobile phones, curfews, etc. For the rest, the intrepid outlaws, the prison gates will be sealed for ever. And, to quell



the weeping of the abolitionists, these contain-ers need no longer even be referred to as prisons. Some less offensive euphemism could be found in order to remove them from the latter's attention: a triumph for democracy and reform.

The struggle against prison is therefore a struggle that concerns all of us, not as something separate and specialised, but an essential component of every struggle against capital and the State. The discourse becomes comprehensible if we enter it as active participants, becoming for a moment one of these comrades in that hall in Bologna so many years ago, with pounding hearts ready to take on the world. Where are they now?

We don't know, but we are here, and that is what counts. Let's destroy all prisons now!

Jean Weir
London October 2008



Introductory Note

Prison is the mainstay of the present society. Often it does not seem so, but it is.

Our permissive, educative society allows itself to be guided by enlightened politicians and is against any recourse to strong measures. It looks on scandalised at the massacres dotted all over the world map, and seems to be composed of so many respectable citizens whose only concerns are respecting nature and paying as little tax as possible. This society, which considers itself to be far beyond barbarity and horror, has prison on its very doorstep.

Now, the mere existence of a place where men and women are held locked up in opportunely equipped iron cages,



watched over by other men and women wielding bunches of keys, a place where human beings spend years and years of their lives doing nothing, absolutely nothing, is a sign of the utmost disgrace, not just for this society but for a whole historical era.

I am writing this introduction in Rebibbia prison and I don't feel like changing a word of the talk that I gave in Bologna a few years ago. If I compare the thickheadedness of the prison institution today with that of my experiences recounted in the text published below, I see that nothing has changed. Nothing could change. Prison is a sore that society tries to in vain conceal. Like the doctors in the seventeenth century who treated the plague by putting ointment



on the sores but left rats running around among the rubbish, today, at every level of the prison hierarchy technicians are trying to cover up this or that horrible aspect of prison, not realising that the only way to face the latter is to destroy it. We must destroy all prisons and leave not one stone standing, not keep a few around in order to remember them in the way that humanity has done with other constructions that testify to the most atrocious infamy.

Now someone who tends to beat about the bush will ask: how can we destroy prison? How can we get rid of it completely in a society like this, where a bunch of bosses called the State decide for everybody and impose these decisions by force?



So, the best of these squawkers, the quick-witted with hearts of gold, try to mitigate prisoners' suffering by giving them cinema once a week, coloured TV, almost edible food, weekly visits, some hope of being released before the end of their sentence and everything else. Of course, these good people want something in exchange. After all, that's not asking too much. They want prisoners to behave and show respect to the warders, acquire the capacity to resist years and years of inactivity and sexual abstinence, undergo psychological treatment by specialised personnel and declare, more or less openly, that they have been redeemed and are capable of returning to the society that expelled them for misbehaving.



I have been a frequenter of prisons for more than a quarter of a century, so can compare a few things. Once prisoners literally lived in an infamous disgusting hole visited by rats and various other creatures. They only saw the light of day for a few minutes, did not have TV and could not even make a cup of coffee in their cells. The situation has certainly improved today. Prisoners [in Italy] can actually make meals, even cakes, in the cell. They have more hours' recreation in a day than they used to get in a month, and can have extra visits and make a few phone calls to the family. They can work for a decent wage (half the average wage outside), watch colour TV, have a fridge, a shower and everything else.

Of course prisoners accept these im-



provements, they're not stupid. And why not. They also accept paying the price, by showing themselves to be good and condescending, arguing with the guards as little as possible and telling stories to the educators and psychologists who hang around the corridors like shadows, waiting for it to be time to go home and for the end of the month to pick up their salary. Apart from the obvious consequence of lowering the level of the clash in prisons, nobody in this scenario really believes that the prisoner will be re-inserted into so-called civil society. It is a farce that each player recites magnificently.

Let's take the priest for example. If he isn't stupid he knows perfectly well that all the prisoners who go to mass



go to meet prisoners from other wings whom they wouldn't otherwise see. He accepts that with the hypocrisy of his trade and gets on with it. Of course, now and again some prisoner will show a sudden faith, enlightenment on the road to Damascus. But this, the priest knows perfectly well, is functional to the treatment for getting out on parole or having a suspended sentence or another of the many benefits provided for by the law but subordinate to the approval of the custodial personnel, educators, psychologists and also the priest.

What was clear when one was face to face with the police becomes hazy inside. Today nearly all prisoners are losing their identity as such and are accepting permissive changes that are gradually



trapping them within a mechanism that promises not so much to redeem them as to let them out a little before the end of their time.

As the attentive reader of this little book will see, there is a line of reasoning that claims to want to “abolish” prison. Now, to abolish means to ablate, ie eliminate, an essential component from society. Leaving things as they are, this abolition would be impossible or, if it were to come about, it would turn out to be in the interests of power.

Let's try to go into this. The only way to do something serious about prison is to destroy it. That is no more absurd or utopian than the thesis that wants to abolish it. In both cases the State, for which prison is essential, would have re-



course to extreme measures. But specific conditions of a revolutionary character could make the destruction of prison possible. They could the create social and political upheaval that would make this utopia come true, due to the sudden absence of the power required for prison to continue to exist.

In the case of abolition, if it were to happen progressively it would mean that the State was providing for prison in a different way. In fact, something of the sort is actually happening. As I will show, prisons are opening up. Political forces that were once quite cut off from them now enter them regularly. There are all kinds of cultural manifestations, cinema, theatre, painting, poetry; all these sectors are hard at work. This opening also



requires the prisoners' participation. At first, participation seems to eliminate disparity, allowing everyone to be equal; it means that people don't have to stay locked up in cells all day and gives them the possibility to talk and make their demands heard. And this is true, in that the "new" prison has taken the place of the "old". But not all prisoners are prepared to participate. Some still have their dignity as outlaws, which they don't want to lose, so they refuse.

I am not proposing the old distinction here between "political" and "common law" prisoners which has never really convinced me. Personally I have always refused—and continue to do so now in the prison where I am writing this introduction—the label of "po-



litical” prisoner. I am referring to the outlaws, those whose lives have been entirely dedicated to living against and beyond the conditions established by law. It is clear that if on the one hand prison is opening up to prisoners who are prepared to participate, it is closing down on those who are not and want to remain outlaws, even in prison.

Given the advances in control in society, the great potential of information technology in this field and the centralisation of the security services and the police, at least at the European level, we can well imagine that those going against the law in the not too distant future really will have the absolute determination of the outlaw.

We can sum up by saying that the



project of power for the future is to abolish the traditional prison and open it up to participation, and at the same time create a new, absolutely closed version: a prison with white coats where the real outlaws will end their days. This is the prison of the future, and those who are talking about abolition will be happy, in that in the future these prisons with white coats might not even be called by such a hateful name, but rather clinics for mental patients. Isn't someone who insists on rebelling and affirming their identity as an "outlaw" in defiance of all propositions to participate in society, absolutely mad? And do mad people perhaps not constitute a medical rather than a penitentiary problem?

Such a society, having a greater ca-



capacity for social and political control, would call for everyone to collaborate in this repressive project, so would have less need to have recourse to sentencing. The very concept of sentencing would be put in question. Basically, most of the prison population today are people who have committed “crimes” such as taking drugs, drug dealing, petty theft, administrative offences, etc, which from one moment to the next might no longer be considered such. By removing these people from prison and reducing the probability of more serious offences such as robbery and kidnapping through increased levels of social control, few actual real crimes will remain. Crimes of passion could very well be dealt with through recourse to house arrest, and that is the intention.



And so, who would remain in prison under such conditions? The few thousand individuals who refuse to accept this project, who hate such a choice and refuse to obey or put themselves down. In a word, conscious rebels who continue to attack, perhaps against all logic, and against whom it will be possible to apply specific conditions of detention and “cure” closer to that of an asylum than an actual prison. That is where the logical premise of prison abolition leads us in the last analysis. The State could very well espouse this thesis at some time in the not too distant future.

Prison is the most direct, brutal expression of power, and like power it must be destroyed, it cannot be abolished progressively. Anyone who thinks they can



improve it now in order to destroy it in the future will forever be a captive of it.

The revolutionary project of anarchists is to struggle along with the exploited and push them to rebel against all abuse and repression, so also against prison. What moves them is the desire for a better world, a better life with dignity and ethic, where economy and politics have been destroyed. There can be no place for prison in that world.

That is why anarchists scare power. That is why they are locked up in prison.

Alfredo M. Bonanno
Rebibbia prison, 20 March 1997





Locked Up

Voici le temps des Assassins

Rimbaud

The prison question is something that anarchists and the revolutionary movement in general have been involved in for a long time. We come back to it periodically because for many of us it is something that touches us directly, or touches comrades close to us, whom we love.

To know what prison is like and why it exists and functions, or how it might cease to exist, or function better according to one's point of view, is no doubt a



very interesting subject. I have heard many talks, conferences, and debates in the past, particularly about ten years ago. At that time reality was seen analytically due to a certain marxism that was boss of the political scene both culturally and practically, and the main aspect of the debate on prison was the professionalism with which it was carried on.

One was usually listening to, or imagined one was listening to, someone who knew something about prison. Well, that's not the case here. In fact, I don't know all that much about prison. I'm not aware of knowing much about prison and I'm certainly not a specialist on the subject, and even less someone who has suffered all that much... a bit, yes. So, if that is the way you see things, I mean



from a kind of professional point of view, don't expect much from this talk. No professionalism, no specific competence. I should say right away that I feel a kind of repulsion, a sense of profound disgust for people who present themselves on a particular subject and split reality up into sectors declaring, "I know all about this subject, now I'll show you." I don't have that competence.

I have had my misfortunes of course, in the sense that I first went to prison over twenty years ago and, in fact, when I found myself locked up in a cell for the first time I found myself in great difficulty. The first thing I wanted to do was destroy the radio, because it was a very loud transmission and after a few minutes locked up in there I felt as though



I were going mad. I took off a shoe and tried to smash the object that was making such an obscene din. The noise was coming from an armoured box screwed into the ceiling next to a light bulb that was constantly lit. After a few minutes, a head appeared at the peephole of the armoured door and said, “Excuse me, what are you doing?” I answered, “I’m trying to ...”, “-No, that’s not necessary, all you have to do is call me, I’m the cleaner, so I switch off the radio from outside and everything’s okay.” At that moment I discovered what prison was, and is. There, that sums up my specific culture on the subject of prison. Prison is something that destroys you, that seems absolutely unbearable, —”how on earth will I be able to survive in here with this thing



driving me crazy”... snap, a little gesture, and it’s over. This is my professionalism on prison. And it is also a little personal story concerning my imprisonment.

There have been many studies about prison of course, but I know little about them. Bear in mind that these studies have not only been carried out by specialists of the sociology of deviance, but even by prisoners themselves, and funded by the Ministry. One such study concerns Bergamo prison. I saw it and found an incredible desire and capacity to do so, who even manage to sell this nonsense off as something interesting. To me this theoretical posing is nothing but sociological gymnastics.

The main supporters of prison, without actually realising or desiring it, are



the prisoners themselves. Just like the worker who sees himself in the dimension of the factory, if he is a factory worker, or in any case in the chains that hold him down. As Malatesta said, being accustomed to the chains we don't realise that we are able to walk, not thanks to them but in spite of them, because there is something that is unclear. Often, when talking to a prisoner who has done twenty, even thirty years' prison, he will tell you about all the woes of prison life etc, of course, but you also realise that he has a love-hate relationship with the institution, because basically it has become his life. And that is part of the problem. So you realise that you cannot work out a critique of prison by starting off from the ideas and experiences that



come out of it, because the experience is certainly negative and full of repulsion and hatred of the place, but it is always ambivalent, like all experiences of life. I have lived this myself and I can't explain how I felt it growing inside me. Human beings are not automata, they don't see things in black and white. Well, it happens that the instant you get out of prison you have the sensation that you are leaving something dear to you. Why? Because you know that you are leaving a part of your life inside, because you spent some of your life there which, even if it was under terrible conditions, is still a part of you. And even if you lived it badly and suffered horribly, which is not always the case, it is always better than the nothing that your life is



reduced to the moment it disappears. So, even pain, any pain, is better than nothing. It is always something positive, perhaps we can't explain it but we know it, prisoners know it. So they are precisely the first to support prison. Then there is common sense, this massive stumbling block, that cannot see how it would be possible to do without prison. In fact, this common sense pushes proposals for the abolition of prison up a blind alley, showing them to be ridiculous because such proposals want to have their cake and eat it, whereas it would be far easier to simply say, "prison is necessary in the present state of affairs". How can I put the jeweller's right to safeguard his property before my right to take his jewels at gunpoint, I who have no money



and nothing to eat? The two things are a contradiction. How can I overcome this contradiction by putting it at the level of a universal contract or a natural right desired by God, the Devil, Reason, or Kropotkinian animism? The only way to look at the problem is the elementary one: if all goes well, I take the money, if it doesn't I do my time. I have spoken to many robbers and one of the first I met said to me, "Listen, you who can read and write, take a piece of paper and do the sums. How much can I earn in three years working in a factory?" (At the time the factory wage was about 15 million [old lire] a month). And, he continued, "If I do a robbery and it goes well I take more than 15 million: 20, maybe 30. If things go wrong I do three years and



I'm back where I started. Moreover, if it does go wrong, I'm not working under a boss who drives me crazy for three years, or in Germany, sleeping in Portacabins. I'm in jail and at least I'm respected here. I'm a bank robber and when I go out into the yard I'm seen as a serious person, not a poor sod that lives from his labour." Frankly, with all my science, I was at a loss for words. What he said didn't sound wrong to me, even at the level of basic economics. And what could I say? "But, you know, you can't touch property". He'd have spat in my face! Or, "The scales are wrong, you must set them right", but then for him they had tipped the scales once and for all. As Fichte, who knew something about philosophy, or at least he thought so, said, "Whoever has



been defrauded of what is due to him on the basis of the social contract has the right to go and take it back.” And he who said that was certainly not a revolutionary or even progressive.

Common sense prevents us from imagining society without prison. It does well, in my opinion, because common sense cannot always be ignored, and a society under the present conditions of production, with the existing cultural and political relations, cannot do without prison. To imagine the elimination of prison from the present social context is a fine utopia good only for filling up the pages of books by those who work in the universities and write in the pay of the State.

The rest, in my opinion, is an abso-



lute waste of time, at least for those who understand anything at all. It might be that I didn't quite get these texts about abolishing prison. Yet I seem to have noticed that some of the people who support abolition, whom I actually know, are the same as those who once called themselves, I'm not saying Stalinists, but at least supporters of the chatter of historical materialism on prison, ie they supported the analyses of prison as a reality that is strictly linked to production. These same people are for the abolition of prison today because the current ideas are no longer Stalinist or authoritarian but are of an anarchist or at least libertarian nature. Apart from these people's extraordinary capacity for political evolution, which never ceases to



amaze me, I insist that, in any case, concepts such as abolition are still stupid, even if they call themselves anarchist. And why not? Can anarchists not talk rubbish? There's nothing strange about that. There's no equation that says anarchist equals intelligent; anarchists are not necessarily intelligent in my opinion. I know many stupid anarchists. And I've encountered many intelligent cops. What's wrong with that? I've never seen anything strange about that.

Yes, the concept doesn't seem difficult because abolition—at least as far as I can see, but perhaps I didn't quite get it, and we are here to clarify our ideas—the abolition of part of something is an ablation. In other words, I take a part and cut it out. Society, of which prison is an



indispensable component today, should therefore take prison and get rid of it like you do with a rotten piece of something. You cut it out and throw it in the dustbin. That is the concept of abolition. Abolish prison and put some other kind of social organisation in its place. In order not to be a prison in all but name, it must not foresee sanctions or the application of a sentence, law, the principle of coercion, etc. What they possibly don't want to see is the fact that abolition of prison implies the upturning of the situation that is juridically created between the victim and the perpetrator of the crime, the so-called guilty party. Today, a separation is between the victim and the guilty one is carried out, and with prison this separation becomes clear. Victim and guilty



party must never meet again, in fact they will forever avoid each other. I will certainly never go to Bergamo to look for the jeweller whose shop I robbed. He would call the police as soon as he saw me, there's no doubt about that.

What happens in the case of abolition? The two protagonists of the illegal deed are not kept apart, on the contrary they are put in contact through negotiation. For example, they establish what the damages amount to together and instead of going to prison the person responsible for the illegal deed pledges to repay the damage, in money or through work. For example, it seems that there are people who are happy to have their houses painted, I don't know, that sort of thing. In my opinion, these absurdi-



ties start off from a philosophical principle that is quite different to that envisaged by the law.

The separation of the Guilty Party from the Victim also depends on the specific situation, except in cases where this was caused by passion or uncontrollable emotions. In most cases, not only does the guilty one try to escape to save the booty or his skin, he also tries to have as little contact with the victim as possible. Then there is the other aspect of separation, that which is institutionalised by the intervention of the judge, the lawyer, the court, the prison. So, not only separation from the victim but also from society, with the aftermath of the particular attention paid to re-entry into society. In order to avoid too brusque a



contact there are often precise police practices: you leave prison, the police patrol picks you up immediately and takes you off to the police station, and you are identified again. You are free because you have finished your sentence, but they are not satisfied. Hence the expulsion orders from certain towns, etc.

Abolition does not foresee any of this. It is a more complex concept, and cannot be grasped immediately. But there remains this curious logical anomaly: in theory ablation is possible, in practice it is impossible in a social context where prison is obviously an essential component.

The destruction of prison, on the other hand—clearly linked to the revolutionary concept of destruction of the



State—exists within a process of struggle. In order for what we said earlier to be fully understood, our discourse must not be based on models of efficiency, as that would distort it. The struggles we participate in and their consequences can never be seen as getting something in exchange for what we do, of necessarily getting results from what we put on the carpet. On the contrary, we are often unable to see the consequences of the struggles we participate in: there is a very wide relational dispersion and the end results cannot be foreseen. We have no idea what might happen as far as other people active in the struggle are concerned, comrades doing different things, changes in relations, changes in awareness, etc. All of these things come



later, when we think everything is over.

We are having this discussion here tonight, and for me this is also struggle... Because it is not enough for me just to talk for the pleasure of hearing my own voice, and I am convinced that some new ideas are entering your heads, just as I am experiencing the joy of being here and feeling your physical presence. We are talking about something close to my heart and I will take this gift you are giving me away with me. Just as I think I can give you something to take away with you that might bear fruit at some time in the future, in another situation, another context. And that has nothing to do with quantity or efficiency. If it means anything at all it means something in practice, in the things we do, in



the transformation we bring about, not in the abstract realm of theory or utopia. That is what I am trying to say about the destruction of prison. Because as soon as we put ourselves in this logic and begin to act, even in discussions like this evening, or with other things that we won't discuss here but could go into tomorrow or at some time in the near future, we begin to transform reality. Prison becomes one element of this transformation, and by transformation we mean destruction—partial destruction in view of the final destruction of the State. I am aware that this concept might seem too rash or too philosophical. But as soon as we start to think about it, it becomes clear because it becomes a basis for all the actions we carry out every day and



for the way we behave with those close to us, those we relate to and who put up with us every day, as well as those whom we see from time to time.

The revolutionary project is also this. There is no such thing as separate worlds, the world I live with my companion, with my children, with the few revolutionary comrades I have met in my life who want to overturn the world, all absolutely separate. That's not so, it's not like that. If I am a bastard in my sexual relations, I cannot be a revolutionary, because these relations immediately transfer themselves into the wider context. I might fool one, two, three people, then the fourth will take me to task and I can't deceive them. There must necessarily be unity of intent, that elective af-



finitude that links me to all my actions, in any context whatsoever, in everything I do, which I cannot separate. If I am a bastard, it will come out sooner or later.

But let's get back to our argument which we seem to have left a long way off.

Let's look at the whole question of prison, the sentence, the judiciary that supports and makes the sentence possible, and I think that most of you here know more about this than I.

I think it would be good if we were to agree on a very simple line of thought: the concept of the sentence is based on one essential principle—the privation that a given person suffers for not having behaved according to pre-established rules. Now, if we look carefully



here, we see that this concept applies to many things, even interpersonal relations. But it only concerns particular sanctions when one finds oneself faced with the law, a State structure that is capable of enforcing the sanction according to preestablished rules, or at least within the ambit of these rules.

What does the State want from the sentence? Not just the State today, which we know to some extent, but the State in general as it has developed over at least the past three hundred years. What does Power, which has not always defined itself as “the State”, want to attain? In the first place it wants to make the so-called guilty party submit to a higher level of physical control than is usual in the so-called free society.



I repeat, I don't have any specific competency in this field but from what I have read, and it isn't much and perhaps not even up to date, the process of control is now mainly entrusted to information technology, data gathering, etc. Basically, the universal recording of our details that is being carried out by the authorities (for example I have seen that they are even filing us through our electricity bills) is, so to speak, a roundup strategy that will end up netting all the fish, so only a few will manage to escape. But this filing is only an approximation. Some countries are far ahead in this field, with very efficient procedures, yet even in these countries there is still some space for extralegal—even if not exactly outlaw—



activity in concrete terms.

The project of power is certainly omnipresent and intends to include everyone in this data gathering. The more effective preventive control is, the more the State becomes boss of the territory. It is no coincidence, for example, that there is so much talk about the Mafia, to the point of overstepping the boundaries between myth and reality, where it is not clear where one begins and the other ends. I don't know if it's worth going into this question which, although fascinating, is not very important in my opinion. However, there can be little doubt that this is being exploited at the moment, also for the mysterious aim of reaching an equilibrium between the political parties... But, apart from all



this, the establishment of strong preventive control should make prison, at least as we know it, far less necessary. So, the function of the sentence is control, and the more this function spreads to the point of becoming preventive, the more prison will tend to change.

We must bear in mind that prison is quite different today to what it was twenty years ago. It has changed more over the past ten years than it did over the last hundred, and the whole process is still moving at this rate. Today, the so-called model prisons are not all that different from the maximum security prisons of the eighties. I don't want to split hairs here, but, in fact, although there were particular forms of control in the maximum security prisons, that



was not the main difference. I was held in a maximum security wing similar to Fossombrone at a time when such places existed, and was under article 90 for a few months, so I know what it means: naked body searches every day, dozens of guards outside the cell door every morning, and everything else. These aspects are certainly terrible but they are not the main thing. There are no effectively maximum security prisons left [in Italy] today. Nowadays they may have fewer hours' sociality in some places, the exercise period may only be allowed in two's or three's, but in the future everything could get much worse. Why?

When control covers the whole social territory the so-called spontaneous prison population will be greatly re-



duced. Many crimes will be declassified and there will be less institutional imprisonment (possibly through the use of electronic devices such as “Trasponder”, electronic bracelets that set off an alarm if you go beyond the assigned perimeter, and so on). Then, yes, there will be a real change in the prisons that remain. Here isolation, psychological torture, and white coats will take the place of bloodstains on the wall, and science will be applied to obtain the total destruction of the outlaws who have no intention of negotiating with the State. That is how we see prison evolving, and I believe that studies are already being carried out on the subject. There would no longer be any need to keep on calling the places of physical annihilation that remain pris-



ons, in fact they could be called anything at all. For example, it would be sufficient to qualify someone's behaviour as insane in order to have them locked up in a mental asylum. And if the law prevents us from calling these places asylums and they are called Jesus Christ, they will still be places where people are being killed slowly.

So, as I said before, the law wants to control but it also wants to bring the offender—ie he who has marked himself with breaking the rules—back to “normality”. It wants to apply an orthopaedic technique to those who have behaved differently, draw them into the system, and render them innocuous. It wants to ensure that this deformed behaviour will not repeat itself, and to



prevent any damage, or presumed damage, to the community.

There is a great contradiction here. Although it no longer fully subscribes to the orthopaedic ideology—and we will see within what limits it does accept it—the judiciary realise that the sentencing actually makes the “different” more dangerous. So, on the one hand they want to rehabilitate deviants through the use of the sentence and on the other this makes them more dangerous. In other words, it gives the individual access to a process that makes him become more of a danger to society, which might have been quite accidental up until then.

The distinction I mentioned is based on the existence of a not-clearly-identifiable minority of rebels that constitute



the real community of outlaws inside the prisons. These irreducible individuals have none of the political characteristics that a debate in the sixties tried to pin on them.

I think that any distinction now between “political” and “common” law prisoners that existed for a long time and caused so much damage in my opinion, no longer has any reason to exist. This distinction was sometimes even proposed and supported by anarchists in the seventies and the first half of the eighties. At that time it was adopted by power in order to maintain a certain equilibrium. For example, when you called the jailer, the politicals would shout *agente* (officer) and the other prisoners *guardia* (guard). So as soon



as you heard someone shouting *agente* you knew that they were a comrade. There, something so simple created a distinction that, moved into other areas often came to be distorted by power and transformed into an instrument of recuperation. This distinction between political and common law prisoners was never really valid anyway in my opinion, except for those who wanted to use a part of the prison population for their own ends: the growth of the militant—military and militant—party, the possibility of building up power relations inside the prison and the plan to use the “lumpenproletarian” prisoners. In a few cases, certain elements were even used to carry out low works of justice, in plain words, as murderers



to kill people. Have I made myself clear? This has taken place. We are talking of an historic responsibility that some of the personalities who once led the old marxist-leninist combatant parties and are in free circulation today took upon themselves. Some of our own comrades were also killed that way. Not because this distinction was made, but by an instrumentalisation of its consequences. It put so-called common prisoners at the disposition of some of those who defined themselves political prisoners in order to increase their bargaining power inside the prison or with the Ministry in order to get certain results. This ran parallel to the militaristic practice of the management of power or counterpower outside (each to their own



taste) and the central importance of the industrial workers, guided by the party that was to lead them to their emancipation. These are all dinosaurs today as far as I am concerned. They're not in touch with reality as I see it, at least I hope they're not, maybe I'm wrong.

It might be useful to pause here for a moment in order to clarify our opposition to any struggle for amnesty, something that raised more than a few objections a number of years ago, even among anarchists.

The situation has changed now concerning relations between the prisoners who insist on positions wrongly defined as irreducible and those who have entered into negotiation with the State. At that time, 1985-86 I think, I published a



book, *And we will Always be Ready to Storm the Gates of Heaven Again**, which many considered to be a criticism of the validity of a struggle for amnesty. The prevailing idea at the time was contained in Scalzone's so-called manifesto which carried, precisely, the proposal of a struggle for amnesty and this was also made by some of the anarchist movement, with the usual lack of comprehension. But that was, let's say, a secondary effect. It wasn't the main aim of the book. The important thing, still today, is that nobody has the right to say, "Comrades, the war is over". First, nobody declared this war in the first place and so, until proved otherwise, no one can decree the end of it. No State declared the war, nor did any armed group have



the idea of declaring one. The reasoning is characteristic of the militarist logic, the logic of opposing groups that decide to call a truce at some point. No one can tell us that “the war is over”, even less so when the reason for doing so is simply to justify one’s own desistence.

If I don’t feel like carrying on, given that no one can be forced to continue if they don’t feel like it, I say, “My friends, a man is made of flesh and blood, he can’t go on to infinity. So, if I don’t feel I can make it, what must I do? Sign a piece of paper? I don’t carry out impure actions, I don’t get comrades arrested, I’m simply making a declaration of my own desistence.” I have always considered this to be a legitimate position, because nobody can be obliged to carry on if they don’t



feel up to it. But desistence is no longer legitimate if , in order to justify it, I come out with the statement, “I can’t carry on because the war is over”. No, I no longer agree, because where does that lead us? To all the others both inside and outside prison for whom it isn’t true that the war is over, or for whom this concept is dubious, but end up believing it because everybody is saying so. And, desisting or not desisting, they end up reaching the same conclusion. It would be quite indecorous for me to push others to desist in order for me to justify my own personal decision to give up the struggle.

Now, conditions are radically different today, not in the sense that this indecorousness no longer exists, but in the sense that it is out of date as other atti-



tudes prevail. They no longer say “The war is over”, which moreover would be unfounded as they should really say “The war never began; our war wasn’t really a social war at all”. But most of them prefer to dedicate themselves to astrology or, sometimes, to assisting prisoners. Yet, if you like, some of them might say, “Perhaps we were wrong about some things, perhaps other ideas should have been accepted in some of the debates that took place around the beginning of the seventies.” That would be a fine critical approach. I’m thinking of one meeting at Porto Marghera where, among other things, the killing of Calabresi [supercop responsible for the death of anarchist Giuseppe Pinelli in 1969 when he was “suicided” from the 4th floor window of



Milan central police station] was under discussion. This was a very important debate, which nobody talks about because hardly anybody knows anything about it. Here, for the first time in Italy, two positions appeared concerning this action... But perhaps not everybody is interested in these questions... Well, between astrology and assistentialism, another hypothesis has appeared, "It's necessary to start the war again, but with different weapons, not with the critique of arms, but with the arms of critique." They are ready to take on the world again, with words. As far as I know, this chatter concerns the management of daily life. So, centres for the elaboration of chatter are appearing everywhere: centres for the elaboration of information, ra-



dio stations (very important, where between some strange music and a pseudo-cultural discussion, concepts of taking over the territory are pushed through), squats verging on legalisation or verging on survival, closed up in themselves in the miserable ghetto. In this way dreams of controlling the territory are reawakened. Through revarnished old concepts, the same old centralised, more or less militant party (but you can't say that any more) management is getting into gear, and a new pattern is emerging. This is all chatter for the time being: if they are roses they will blossom. I think that's what is happening, we don't need to give precise indications, we all know what I'm talking about. This chatter has some interesting aspects: the recycling of old



cariatids in disuse... Of course, me too. I'm an old cariatid, for goodness sake... But I still have some ideas that seem to me to be interesting... That's just my opinion, I might be wrong.

There is still a nucleus of comrades in prison who are not prepared to bargain with the State. Our solidarity can go to these comrades, but that's not enough. It can't be enough for someone with centuries of prison on their backs. Detailed proposals are necessary, indications setting out the concrete destruction of prisons. At the present time, at least so it seems to me, there is no sign of any project based on the destruction of prisons. It is necessary to start all over again. If you insist on a kind of cohabitation with power, you increase desistence from the



struggle. And it is not just a question of a model of intervention that I disagree with but which I might take into consideration while doing other things, if I could. Unfortunately, this whole mechanism is starting up again and could give certain results, results that are not acceptable to us, but which in themselves are quite legitimate. That is why the situation is different today. On the other hand, you won't get far with demonstrations of solidarity, such as, for example, one hundred thousand postcards addressed to the President of the Republic. These things are usually a waste of time, they have never meant much. Yes, letters, telegrams, might help comrades to feel they haven't been abandoned, because it's nice for someone in prison to



get letters of solidarity, etc. Then, within certain limits, that can make an impression on the prison authorities and on the individual screw, who when he passes to control you at night might not keep the light on for three seconds, but only one, because he's scared and says to himself, "This one got twenty telegrams today, maybe one of his friends will be waiting for me outside and split my head open". Very important things, for goodness' sake, I'm not denying it. It's a question of doing something, applying pressure, even minimal, in order to create a more important deterrent perhaps, but looking at things realistically I'm afraid these comrades still have many years ahead of them.

The debate on amnesty was not a



simple theoretical exercise, however. It soon became an instrument for realizing certain practical actions and suggesting a way of intervening on the question of prison. It was, and continues to be, important in trying to pose the problem of prison from a revolutionary point of view. The acceptance of the struggle for amnesty was a macroscopic mistake, in my opinion. It was also proposed inconsiderately and ignorantly by more than a few anarchists who, not knowing what to do, and not being aware of the risks implicit in such a choice, decided to support it. It was a serious political and revolutionary mistake which, I have to say in all honesty, I didn't make.

For example, the position regarding the Gozzini law* changed in relation to



the justification of the struggle for amnesty. Such choices had consequences for the supporters of revolutionary authority. Clearly if somebody says that prison changes deterministically according to the changes in society, any attempt by the enemy to adjust my behaviour to the historical evolution of reality, for example the Gozzini law, is all right by me. So I accept it, in view of the struggle moving into other sectors. The same goes for trade union bargaining. So I don't see why it should be any different for prison. What seems like innocent sociological theory becomes a precise political choice involving the lives and future of thousands of comrades in prison. We have always maintained that we are against amnesty, or rather a struggle for



amnesty—which are two different things (when they give us an amnesty of their own accord we'll take it, and how).

Now let's come back to the contradictions inherent in the concept of the sentence and the various ways in which it is applied. The theoretical debate on prison still contains the basic contradictions seen above, which are really unsolvable.

In fact, these contradictions have become more acute in recent times. Not that they didn't exist before, but the function of the sentence, the structure meting it out, and prison itself—let's say around or up until 1500—was to hold people until given sanctions were applied. Or they functioned purely as separation, to keep certain people away



from their social context. “I Piombi”, in the seventeenth century, as you can read in Casanova’s *Memoires*, was a prison in Venice that was self-managed by the inmates. There were no custodians inside the prison walls, only outside, and that was one of the worst prisons of the era. But already with the “Piombi” we are later than 1500, we are fully into the seventeenth century.

So the old prison had a different function. The aim of the modern prison is to “recuperate”—we are talking about the theory behind it—to bring the individual back to a condition of normality. So prison has had two functions, the old one where it was simply a place in which the individual was parked while awaiting his or her fate (the death penalty, muti-



lation, exclusion from the social context, a journey to the Holy Land, which was equivalent to the death penalty given the difficulties of such a journey in 1200-1300) and the modern one. Between these there was the introduction of the so-called workhouses at the beginning of the seventeen hundreds, with the aim of getting prisoners to work.

At a purely cultural level there was a theoretical debate that we don't need to go into here. Suffice it to say that prison structures such as Bentham's Panopticon, where a single custodian could control all the wings at once—and bear in mind that similar structures still exist in many prisons today—saw the light at the same time as the industrial revolution. Some see a historical parallel between



these two developments, the figure of the modern prisoner emerging alongside that of the worker in the early industrial plants. The industrial condition develops and transforms, and has been the object of much criticism, whereas the concept of naturalism in law remains, and *gius-naturalism* [natural law] is still at the root of the sacrality of the norm.

It doesn't really make any difference whether the sacrality of the norm originates from the positivist doctrine, from God, from a law intrinsic to the development of animated beings, or is intrinsic to the development of the History of man and the vicissitudes of human reason (historical finalism). Anybody supporting any one of these theses is always looking for a foundation upon which to



erect their own behavioural construction, their own castle of rules. Once the latter is built, anyone who finds themselves outside the fortified circle becomes a legitimate candidate for prison, segregation, exclusion, or death, as the case may be.

Now, the thesis that interests us most, because it is still an object of debate and study today, is that concerning natural law (ie a law that is natural to reason as it develops throughout history). This concept is important because it allows for some interesting modifications, that is to say it has not been crystallised once and for all in the will of God, but changes according to events in history. It developed fully with the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, has all the limi-



tations of the philosophical interpretation of the time, and contains two essential elements: first history, then reason. History is seen to be progressive, moving from a situation of chaos, animality, or danger towards one that is safer and more humane. Bovio said, "History is moving towards anarchy", and many anarchists, at least of my generation, have repeated that. I have never believed it possible to draw such a straight line on this question. I am not at all convinced that history is moving towards anarchy. There is another shadow in this beautiful enlightened, then positivist, then idealist, then historicist, discourse, that runs parallel to it. All of these theories were elaborated in the academia of power, in universities where philosophy and



history are studied, places where the suppliers of the State prisons are hard at work. And what is this other shadow? It is the Shadow of Reason. Why is Reason always right? I don't know. It is always right to sentence someone. People are sentenced to the electric chair with reason, nobody is sentenced to death without reason, there are a thousand reasons for sentencing people to death. A sentence without reason doesn't exist. I have been in prison many times, with reason, their reason.

It has been said that Nazism, realized in Germany in the thirties and forties, was an explosion of irrationality, that is, of a lack of reason. Well, I have never believed such a thing. Nazism was the extreme consequence of the applica-



tion of reason, ie the Hegelian reason of the objective spirit that realizes itself in History, taken to its natural conclusion. The most logical discourse in this sense was made by an Italian philosopher, Gentile, at a conference in Palermo where he made reference to the moral force of the truncheon. By striking in the name of reason, the truncheon is always right, and State violence is always ethical because the State is ethical.

All this might sound stupid, but it isn't because it constitutes the foundation of so-called modern progressivism. We have seen this in the Communist Party, the workers' party, in marxist so-called revolutionary movements, and also on the Right, in right-wing movements. Whereas the Right, for its own reasons



of identity, wrapped itself up in conventional irrationalism (flags, symbols, discourses on destiny, blood, race, etc), the former packaged themselves in another variety: progress, history, the future, the proletariat that was to defeat the bourgeoisie, the State that was to extinguish itself. And, I might add, more than a few anarchists tagged on to this discourse, going along with this enormous metaphysical and ideological swindle. They simply pointed out that history was not moving towards the extinction of the State but towards anarchy and that it was necessary to extinguish the State right away in order to reach anarchy more quickly. This ideological subtlety did not move the content of this journey an inch from the marxist one. And it nev-



er entered anyone's head that it was the discourse of reason, and that it might be a swindle and serve as a basis and an alibi for building a wall around the different.

That is why it is necessary to look at the optimism of the anarchists—for example Kropotkin's—more deeply and critically, in order to see the limitations of this way of thinking. It is important to see the equivocation of Kropotkin's “seed under the snow” as well as those of other comrades of the anarchist positivist tendency. Everything that I'm saying here might seem far from the question of prison—on the contrary, this is exactly the theoretical and philosophical territory in which prison finds its justification.

We should also look at Malatesta's



voluntarism, which seems to be the opposite but fails to come up with any solutions unless it is inserted within the “objective” deterministic development of history in the direction of anarchy. I might have limitations, my personal capacity might be circumscribed, but history is moving towards anarchy anyway, so if it doesn’t come about now it will do some time in the future. We should also take a look at the limitations of Stirner’s individualism, something we tried to do at the recent meeting in Florence. We need to see if such limitations really exist and if so, what they are, obviously being very different from those of Malatesta and Kropotkin.

So, what conclusions can we draw at this point? Prison is not an abuse of



power, it is not an exception, it is normal. The State builds prisons so that it can put us in them. In so doing it is not doing anything strange, it is simply doing its job. The State is not a prison State, it is the State, that's all. In the same way that it expresses itself through economic and cultural activity, political management and the management of free time, it deals with the management of prison. These elements are not separate, it is impossible to talk about prison on its own, it wouldn't make sense because it would be taking one element out of context. On the other hand, if this element is put into its proper context, and that is exactly what the specialist cannot do, the discourse changes. That is why we started off with the problem of specialisation,



because the specialist is only able to talk about his own subject. “Given that I know something about prison, I don’t see why I should talk about anything else”.

I believe that collective experiences, if this concept still means anything, are composed of so many individual moments. Woe betide if we were to obliterate these individual moments in the name of a superior one, that which the marxists defined subsumption. Subsumption of society, never! These terroristic processes must be absolutely condemned. The individual has a moment that is his or hers and the prisoner has his or her moment, which is not the same as that of another prisoner. I absolutely disagree with those who say that I, who have been in prison, must struggle



more effectively than someone who has not. No, because I struggle differently from someone who has never been in prison and just as differently from one who has done more time than me, and so on. And, vice versa, I could meet a comrade who is capable of making suggestions to me, of making me understand, feel, imagine, or dream a different kind of struggle, even if he has never been in prison. No specialisation. Remember the first things that were said this evening: no professionalism, no talk of professors, even less professors of prison matters. Fortunately, there is no specialisation here, we are not at university.

We are all individuals who seek each other, who meet, go away, come together again, moving on the basis of affinity



(also transitory) which can disappear or intensify. We are like a multitude of atoms in movement, which have a very strong capacity for reciprocal penetration. It is not a question, as Leibnez said, of monads without windows. We are not isolated, we have our individual value, all individuals do. Only by keeping this ineliminable moment constantly present is it possible to talk of society, or the capacity to act, move and live together, otherwise any society at all would be a prison. If I must sacrifice even a tiny part of my individuality in the name of the *Aufhebung*—overcoming in the Hegelian sense of the term—in the name of an abstract principle... even anarchy, even freedom, then I don't agree. Prison is certainly an extreme condition and



so, like all total conditions, total institutions, it shows one's true fabric clearly. It is like pulling a piece of cloth as far as it can go, and just before it tears apart the weave begins to appear. There, the individual who submits to the most violent conditions reveals the cloth of which he or she is made. Maybe he or she will discover things about themselves that they would never have imagined in other situations. But this starting point is important and fundamental: no element, idea, dream, or utopia can take away this individual moment, nor can the latter be sacrificed to any of the former.

But let's come back to our argument. Prison is the normality of the State, and we, who live under the State with our daily lives regulated by its pace and times,



are living in a prison. In my opinion this has been incorrectly but interestingly defined as an immaterial prison. That is to say, it is not visible as such. It does not enclose us in such a direct, shocking way as the walls of a prison do. It is nevertheless a real prison, in that we are forced to submit to and adopt models of behaviour that we didn't decide upon ourselves, but have been imposed from outside, about which we can do very little.

But prison is also a construction. It is a place, an ideology, a culture, a social phenomenon. That is, it has a specific identity, so if on the one hand we bring it out of this specificity, we cannot at the same time dilute it into society, and simply say, "We are all in prison, my situation was no different when I passed



through that wretched door and found myself in an empty cell with a loud radio blaring.” I felt a trauma the moment I walked through that cell door and heard someone lock it behind me. This trauma exists, it’s not purely psychological, it also consists of a fellow with a bunch of keys that jangle continuously, the noise of which you carry with you for the rest of your life. You never forget it, it’s something that rings in your ears, even at night when you’re asleep, that noise of the keys, someone locking the door on you. This fact of closing the door is, I believe, one of the most horrifying things that one human being can do to another. For me someone who holds a key in his hand and locks a human being behind a door, no matter



what the latter might have done, for me anyone who closes that door is an absolutely contemptible person, one about whom it is impossible to talk about in terms of human fraternity, human features, and so on. Yet there are moments when you need this individual, when a psychological mechanism connected to solitude lets loose. When you are alone, in your hole... You've been alone for a month, a month and a half, two months. The days pass and you don't see anyone, sometimes you hear incredible noises, at other times nothing, and you hear a footstep there outside. You know it is his footstep. You are absolutely convinced that this is the worst, most contemptible person on earth. Yet at a certain point you stand behind the door and wait for



him like a lover because when that despicable person passes he throws you a glance that reminds you that you are a human being. Because he too has two legs, two arms and two eyes. At a certain point you see him differently. You no longer see the uniform, and you say to yourself, "Humanity still exists after all".

That is what that hole, that little cell, leads to, so you now have something specific that can no longer be seen as the dilution of prison into daily life. That is why prison is not immaterial. That is why prison is both a specific, architectonic structure, and is at the same time diffused. We are all in prison, but prison is also something different. But we must not only see it as something different because if we did we would cease to un-



derstand it.

I understand that all this might seem contradictory at first. But that is just an impression. If you think about it, it is no more contradictory than anything else.

The sentence, we said, is the mechanism that the so-called important philosophers... Think of what Kant said about the sentence... This great philosopher said something horrendous... He said, "On an island there is a community, and this community dissolves itself and everybody goes away, only one man remains, a murderer, the last to kill a man. Now the community has broken up, there is absolutely nothing to safeguard, there is no longer a common good, there is nothing left to revive, well, that man must still do his sentence." This is what



Kant said, the philosopher who opened up the perspective of modern historicism. Bah!

Anyway. So, the sentence, what does it do? According to theoreticians of every hue, it restores the equilibrium that has been upset, it redresses a balance. But what does the sentence really do? It does something else. First of all it precipitates the individual into a condition of uncertainty. That is, anyone facing such a construction, such an efficient mechanism, finds himself before something bigger than himself. This mechanism is composed of lawyers, judges, carabinieri, police, house searches, pushing and pulling, curses, being stripped naked, flexions—once there used to be anal inspections, which anyone who hasn't



been subjected to can't imagine—the conditions of detention in the prison... That is the sentence. You are still at the beginning, you still haven't been accused of anything yet, just a few words on a piece of paper bearing an article of the penal code that you don't even understand, but already the sentence enters your blood and becomes part of you. And how does it become part of you? By putting you in a condition of uncertainty. You don't know what's going to happen to you. You can be the most hardened criminal and find yourself in that state of uncertainty, and I know that because I have spoken to people who are apparently in control, people who, when they come into prison, greet the officer in charge, greet this one and



that one, but when they go to bed and put their head on the pillow, start to cry. Because the situation is like that, when you come to find yourself in these conditions it's not easy to see how it's all going to end. I've also spoken to many comrades, we have joked together about the situation in prison, but we couldn't deny that we had been placed in a situation of uncertainty where you don't know what to expect the next day... And this condition of uncertainty is perhaps the essential element, the one at the root of all the syndromes, all the specific illnesses, everything that emerges from time in prison. You will be in a condition of uncertainty all the time you are inside. In fact, up until three minutes before you go through the last gate—bear



in mind that there are about twenty between your cell door and the outside one—you don't know whether, exactly two metres away from the last gate, a revolt will break out inside, you'll get involved in it and you're lost; you can start talking again twenty years on. So, this uncertainty is practically inside you, you know it's inside you, and you can't say, "OK, after all I'm a revolutionary, all this doesn't affect me: prison, death, twenty years, two months..." Comrades, that's bullshit. It's bullshit that *I've* said, me too, to give myself courage, and also to give courage to others, the family, my mother, my father, who were old and were broken-hearted by the visits. When I went to prison the first time they cried, poor things. These are difficult



situations, and you project uncertainty towards the outside, you project it onto those who love you, your children, on a whole situation that doesn't disappear with chatter. I remember when, precisely finding myself in isolation for the first time, twenty-five years ago, I started to sing anarchist songs... and I hate anarchist songs. How did I manage to sing these songs in there? I was singing to give myself courage, like a child that starts to whistle or tell fairy stories so as not to be scared in the dark.

The other element, which I experienced palpably, was the deformation of communication. You can't communicate. In order to be able to say something, let's say to change your lawyer, a whole bureaucratic procedure must



be gone through: in the evening you have to stick a piece of paper on the armoured door of your cell saying that you want to go to the registry office next day. The next day they call you, and you set off to the office. Calculating, let's say, that it's about seventy-five metres away, you think you'll only be a few minutes, but no! It can take from ten minutes to an hour and a half to cross these seventy-five metres, and, like an idiot, you wait behind each door for some angel in uniform to come and open it for you, trac-trac, and you pass the first, second, third, fourth obstacle, and everything else. This changes your world completely. What does it change? It changes your whole conception of time and space. It sounds easy, because we cope with this



concept like we do with money, like coins that we use every day. But it's not so simple, because time is not what is marked by the clock: that is absolute time, Newton's time, that has been determined once and for all. Alongside this time there is that of a French philosopher, and this is known as the real duration, that's to say, there is time in the sense indicated by Saint Augustine, time as consciousness, as the duration of our consciousness. That is waiting. We measure waiting by the beat of our sensations, and its duration is not at all equal to the absolute time of the clock.

Once clocks were forbidden in prison, now, since the prison reform in 1974, they are allowed. And it's worse, in my opinion. Once you never knew what



time it was, you guessed it with the sun, or with the prison routine, which constituted a “natural” clock, an institutional clock, hence you knew that at half past seven the armoured door would be opened and the day would begin. The noise they make in opening that door has its historically recognizable function, which has developed in various ways throughout time. While doing some research on the Inquisition, I found instructions in a manual of 1600 on how to open the door in cases where the Confratelli della Compagnia dei Bianchi, the ones with the white hoods that is, had to take a condemned prisoner to the scaffold. The Spanish Inquisition also existed in Sicily, so they were well organised. Those belonging to this



Compagnia dei Bianchi had the job of assisting condemned prisoners during the three days preceding execution. One of their tasks was to ensure that they were ready to be brought to justice, and how did they do that? By inventing a particular technique: they acted as though they were about to take the prisoner to the scaffold. They woke him up early, made a lot of noise, marched in groups with all those entrusted with this operation, the halberdiers, etc. But it wasn't true, it was merely an atrocious staging, simply to see how the poor devil would react. If they reacted properly, ie didn't go crazy, they were considered ready for the final operation. So, opening an armoured door isn't like opening just any door. These well-built young men, instructed in Par-



ma, had received particular dispositions: the armoured door is to be opened with extremely violent blows, the sleeping prisoner must jump up in the air. From that moment he must think, "There, the world of dreams is over, now the institution begins, now they are telling me what to do..." Half past seven, you don't go out, you go out at half past eight. In other words, you do everything according to the prison routine, which is obviously what they want.

For example, I don't know, something important... The passage of time is also marked by other things: the milk arrives in the morning (I have thought a lot about these little things, anyway there's nothing else to do in prison so what do you do? You think), then they



bring you an egg or two at ten, then at half past ten or eleven the fruit, then at twelve o'clock lunch, then at two they bring you something else, I don't know, some jam. Why? Because that way the time passes, they regulate it for you. The arrival of the food is an event, you frame it within this segregative context and that is what your life boils down to.

All this seems piffle, but in my opinion it is science, real prison science. What do the so-called prison operators who think they know everything, know about all this? First of all, the university professor has never been in prison. Normally those who take an interest in prison don't have the faintest idea of what it really is. Let's leave aside law professors, who don't even know what they are talking about,



poor things. We are talking about prison workers who, the closer they seem to get to the inside of prison the less they possibly understand about it. Lawyers and judges yes, they have been inside prisons, but where? In the external part, in the visitor's rooms. Apart from exceptional cases where a superintendent from the court comes into the wing (but he only comes into the wing, not the cells), lawyers and judges don't normally know what a prison is. I'll go further, even the prison workers, the psychologists, social workers, every species of cop, don't know what prison is. In fact, what is their job? They go into rooms that are reserved for them, call the prisoner, have a fine discussion, then go home and eat their dinner. And, moreover, even the screws



don't know what prison is, and can I tell you that from personal experience. For example, when I was in Bergamo prison and the other prisoners and I, within the limits of our possibilities, organised—we didn't call it a revolt, but a kind of protest—because they were taking out the plugs we used to block the holes that the screws had made in the toilets to control us even there. All prisoners block these holes as best they can, with anything they can lay their hands on: paper, pieces of wood, hanging towels and a hundred other things. Usually these defences are left alone, but sometimes the governor in Bergamo gave the order to get rid of them, so the screws pushed them out with a pencil. In answer to our protest the governor replied, "Why are



you making such a fuss about nothing, after all we are all men.” What, we are all men? “You are the governor and I am the prisoner and I don’t want the guard looking at me when I’m in the toilet.” So the governor thought that the problem was something trivial. But this barracks camaraderie showed that, although he was the governor of a prison, he had no idea what prison is. Because I do not go to the toilet along with my cell mate, a prisoner like myself, a companion of mine whom you certainly can’t—in terms of humanity, friendship and personal relationship—compare to a prison governor, that’s obvious. And when the toilet was in the cell, one invented a thousand expedients to find the way to use it alone. The toilet used to be right inside the cell.



When I was in prison for the first time, in Catania nearly a quarter of a century ago, I got work registering the prisoners' accounts, and I noticed that many prisoners consumed a huge amount of S. Pellegrino magnesium. When I asked why, they explained that by taking this purgative every week their shit didn't smell, or at least it did less. What does that show us? That the governor and the screws have no idea about what prison is. Because to understand prison, you must be on the other side of the door when the guard locks it. There is the question of the key, without the key it's all theory.

So, to get back to the point. Of course, prison is composed of the walls, the cop with the machine gun patrolling them, the exercise yard, the mist that descends



on the yard and you don't know where you are, what planet you're on, whether you're in exile, on the moon, etc. But, basically, prison is the cell. And you can be alone in that cell or with others, and these are two separate conditions and two different kinds of suffering. Because yes, we are strong, etc, but I have done prison alone, and it's no joke. The last time I did almost two years alone, and it was heavy. Perhaps with others it is even heavier, or at least it is heavy in a different way because the animal man behaves strangely in reclusion and so... This is a rough outline of the problems to do with prison, told lightly, and I won't go into certain other questions.

I had made a note of some other problems but they are not very impor-



tant. I just want to mention a couple of things, first the smell. Prison has a particular smell that you never forget. You smell it in the morning. I remember, it's a smell that you find in three other places: bars when they open in the morning, billiard rooms, and brothels. In places where the human animal finds itself in particular conditions of suffering there is a particular odour, and prison has this smell and you never forget it. You notice it most in the morning when they open the armoured doors, don't ask me why. The other problem is noise, the noise is really something terrible, there's no way you can get used to it. It's not just the music, the Neapolitan songs that torture you. You can't describe it, it's something horrendous. Whereas a



problem of secondary importance, at least as far as I could see, and not only from my own personal experience, was the problem of sexual desire; this is not such a problem as it might seem from outside. I saw the prisoners' response to a questionnaire sent round by the ministry about fifteen years ago concerning the eventuality of setting up a system of so-called love hours, let's say, with one's legitimate partner, and it was almost completely negative.

Now let's look at the final part of the question, if you are not too dazed. What can the perspective of prison be? That is, in what way is power trying to restructure prison conditions (which, obviously, are never static)? Prison is uncertain by definition, so you never know what's



going to happen. This uncertainty is also ambivalent as far as the rules are concerned. There is a law that says that the prisoner must be given a copy of the prison rules when he or she arrives, in order to read and respect them, if they want. In some prisons, like the Dozza in Bologna, for example, they give a three page extract, but the actual rules are a beast of one hundred fifty pages. So incredible things happen. If someone gets hold of all the rules and reads them carefully they can end up creating problems for the institution.

I said prison is something that is constantly undergoing profound transformation and, in my opinion (this is my personal idea), is moving towards an opening, that is, it is tending to open



up and have people participate. In the seventies it took you about an hour to make a fried egg or a coffee in your cell, because you had to make a kind of construction with empty match boxes covered in silver paper from cigarette packets, then put solid gas under it, the so-called “mela”, then light this thing, always messing about with this alchemy near the toilet because there were no tables or chairs. You had to fold up the bed in the morning so there was a kind of platform to sit on. There is a considerable difference between these primordial conditions and those of today where there are even structures where you can cook in the judicial prisons as well as the penal institutions (the latter are even better equipped and more “open”).



The reform has been approved. This reform has certainly improved prison conditions to some extent, of course. It has created a few extra moments of sociality, made other things worse, and led to greater disparity between prisoners. The Dozza, for example, is a model prison. Built as a special high security prison, it is now being used as a normal one and it is infinitely worse than the old San Giovanni. I have been in both and can honestly say that the Dozza is worse. But whereas there were bars over the windows at San Giovanni, then the metal grid behind the bars, then the ventilation grid, in the Dozza there are only vertical bars and so you seem to be more free but with all that conditions on the whole are worse, they are more



inhuman. Whereas at San Giovanni you couldn't leave your cell and walk about in the wing, in the Dozza you are free to do so (always in the hours fixed by the direction) so, there are differences... But these are, you might say, pulsations within the prison system. It's sufficient for something to go wrong and the wider berth immediately restricts itself. If instead of one prisoner hanging himself every fifteen days there is one a week, things immediately start to change. At the end of 1987, precisely at the Dozza, there was a simple protest which the prison authorities responded to with an armed attack against the infirmary, led by the nazi-style military commander of the prison. In such situations prison changes in a flash.



But these pulsations inside particular prisons are related to the pulsation of development and transformation in the prison system as a whole, which is moving towards an opening. Why is this? Because it corresponds to the development of the prison system, the extension of its peripheral structures and the structures of the State as a whole. That is to say, there is more participation. This concept deserves to be looked at more closely. Bear in mind, on the basis of what we were saying before about contradictions, that the concept of participation is not at all separate from the concept of separateness. I participate and in an initial phase of this participation I feel closer to the others who participate along with me. As this increases, however, the very



process of participation isolates me and makes me different from the others, because each one follows his own road in this participation. Let's try to illustrate this concept better, because it is not very simple. You can see participation everywhere, in schools, in the factory, in the various functions of the unions, in school and factory councils, basically in the whole world of production. Participation comes about in different ways according to the situation. In the ghetto areas of cities, for example. Take the St Cristoforo area in Catania [Sicily], for example. It is one of the biggest ghettos in the town, with a high concentration of social problems. But things are changing; there are the family consultancies, whereas once the police couldn't even circulate



there. How has this greater participation changed the area? Has it brought it closer to or taken it further away from the rest of Catania? That is the question. In my opinion, it has isolated it from the other areas even more, by making it even more specific. In my opinion, the aim of participation is to divide.

Prison is opening up to participation, there are structures for an inside-outside dialogue, such as “Prison-territory”, let’s say, composed of a bunch of swindlers, third-rate ideologues, representatives of town councils, unions, and schools, and delegations from the Bishopric. All this mob does is to get authorisations to go inside the prison based on article 17, and contact the prisoner, thereby establishing a contact between inside and out-



side. Any prisoner has one hundred, one thousand problems, he or she is like a patient. If you go into a hospital and talk to a patient, they have all the illnesses in the book. If you go into prison and talk to a prisoner you will find that he or she has a thousand problems. Above all, they are always innocent, didn't do anything wrong, and their family is always needy. Well, the things prisoners always talk about. On the other hand, they each look after their own interests and, in any case, it's not appreciated in prison for someone to come out with, "Prison doesn't do anything to me, it's bullshit, rubbish...", no, that wouldn't go down well.

Participation causes further separation, a greater division inside the prison, because the few people of a consciously



illegal disposition, that is to say the ones who really are outlaws, stand out. In a prison population of, let's say, one hundred prisoners, you can already distinguish them in the yard. There you can see who the serious people are and who are not, and you can see that in many ways, from the many signals they give out. A whole discourse develops inside, based on the way they walk, the choices they make, the words they use. I know, many of these things can be taken the wrong way. I am not praising stereotypical behaviour, what I'm saying is that there's a specificity inside prison. There is the prisoner who is aware of his job of being a prisoner, his qualification as a prisoner, and there is the prisoner who finds himself locked up by mistake,



who might very well have been a bank manager, or simply a poor idiot. There is even the prisoner who finds a transitory systemization in prison, who sees prison as a passing accident (as short as possible) or a form of social assistance. I have seen people get themselves arrested just before Christmas because at Christmas they give Christmas dinner (you think that's nothing?), or to get properly cleaned up, or to be cured, because for many of them there is no other way to get treatment—and there is not one but hundreds of such cases.

But there is another prison population, those who pride themselves in being outlaws, in being able to attack determined structures of the State their own way. This population is obviously



not prepared to play the game of participation, so will stand out and be subjected to very precise separation. That is why participatory prison is a prison of division, because it separates. Not all are able to participate at the same level, not everybody accepts a dialogue with power. And the greater the participation, the greater the number of signals that come from it, the more the sectorialisation of the prison world becomes visible.

Much remains to be said concerning the question of accepting a relationship with the prison institution. I am not going into all that today, having done it many times in the past. But let's take the question of parole. This is not something that can be summed up as a direct relationship between prison and pris-



oner. Before parole is granted there is a whole procedure called “treatment” (the choice of the word is no coincidence, in that the prisoner is seen as a patient). The treatment is a series of decisions that he or she must make one after the other. It begins with a meeting with the psychiatrist, then there is taking a job inside the prison and that depends on your not having had any problems inside, so it’s something that goes on for two or three years. You have to choose the road of bargaining with power well in advance. A legitimate choice, for goodness sake, but always in the optic of that desistence for which one says, “I don’t feel like carrying on. I’m not damaging anyone and I’m going to take this road”... Well, if the guard behaves in a certain way I pretend



to look at the wall that seems to have got very interesting all of a sudden; if there's a problem, I'm not saying a revolt, but a simple problem, I stay in the cell and don't go out into the yard. All this involves a choice, there is no clear alternative between detention and parole, that's pure theory, in practice it's not like that. Basically this problem exists for prisoners who have a coherence as revolutionaries. But prisoners in general, who find themselves inside for their own reasons and have never claimed any "political" identity no matter how rarified this concept has become, see things in terms of the practicability of a choice and do not pose themselves such problems even remotely. They have their own personal history and the way it fits in with what



the law offers them. This itinerary takes two or three years, it's not something that happens in a day.

Of course, the prison of the future, which I believe will be far more open than the present one, will receive more attention so will be far more repressive and more closed, totally closed, towards the minority that does not accept bargaining, does not want to participate, and refuses to even discuss anything. That is why I have spoken of the relationship between participation and division, a relationship that is anything but obvious at first sight. Things that seemed so far apart turn out to be close together: participation creates division.

So, what to do? We have often asked ourselves this question as far as prison



is concerned. I've just read a little pamphlet. I hardly ever read anything about prison on principle, because it disgusts me to read these texts that go on and on about it. But, as I had been asked by some comrades, I accepted a "family" discussion, let's say. So, I was saying, I read this pamphlet. It was published by the comrades of Nautilus publications and contained an abolitionist text on prison, then an article by Riccardo d'Este. It was interesting, even though I didn't understand exactly what he wanted to say, I mean, whether he was making a critique of abolitionism or not, or whether he couldn't manage to do so completely, given that he was presenting this pamphlet. But there's something I don't like in this text and that is what I want to say,



and when I see Riccardo I'll tell him. He condemned, absolutely and without appeal, those who have theorised or carried out attacks against prisons in the past. This judgement seems wrong to me. He says this... bear in mind that Riccardo is a very good comrade whom you perhaps got to know at one of his conferences here in Bologna... he says, "These attacks were nothing, they were senseless, in fact they have built the prisons anyway." But come on, dear man! You who are against efficientism in everything else, you say something that is eminently efficientist. What does "they built the prisons anyway" mean? Perhaps anything we do, when it doesn't produce the desired result, or doesn't reach the desired goal, isn't worth a damn? Sorry if I put



this so simplistically, but the question of the attack on prisons is of particular interest to me. But no! Prisons must be attacked. That doesn't mean to say that once it has been decided to attack them they will all disappear. Or that because we have attacked them once we can say we are happy and will do nothing else to destroy them. I remember the attempt to destroy the prison of Sollicciano when it was being built. The attempt was made, but the prisons of Sollicciano were built all the same. But what does that mean, that the attack was pointless? I don't think so. Because if we were to come to the conclusion that Riccardo did, perhaps by a slip of the pen, as I'd like to think, we must condemn everything we do. Because nothing that revolutionary



and anarchist comrades do is guaranteed to obtain the desired result and reach its goal in absolute. If that were the case we would really all be at peace.

Concerning Riccardo d'Este's text, it should be said that I don't know his ideas just from reading the pamphlet on prison, but also through having spoken to him. Riccardo is a fascinating person, but when you listen to him, or read him, you do well to separate what he writes from what he says, the wheat from the chaff, to see how much is valid and how much is the fascinating way he says it.

In my opinion, a separation of the kind he makes on the question of a possible interaction between reform and extremism doesn't exist. In reality there are not struggles that are reformist and



others that are revolutionary. It is the way that you carry out a struggle that counts. As we said earlier, the way you behave with others counts a great deal: if I behave with my companion in a certain way, am I a reformist or a revolutionary? No, these are not the alternatives, it is more a question of seeing whether I am a bastard or not. And if I make a distinction between my way of being and my way of acting, my way of being in the intimacy of my relations with those close to me and my “political” way of appearing, then the distinction about reformism becomes valid. It is absurd to talk about these concepts in abstract.

The individual must make up his or her mind as to what their basic choices are in everything they do. If not, if they



are continually copping out, they will clearly be revolutionaries in word alone, or they might conquer the world, but in order to do what? To enact a new theatre of Greek tragedy. The above distinction only exists in the world of the politician, that of the spectacle, representation (in Schopenhauer's sense of the term). If we reduce the world to this representation (let's not forget that Schopenhauer lent his binoculars to a Prussian officer so he could take better aim and shoot insurgents; this is the man who talks to us of the "world as representation", not the one that some anarchist readers have dreamed of from his book) then, yes, it is possible to make a distinction between reform and revolution, but again this is chatter. These abstract ideas don't exist



in reality. There is the individual, with everything he or she relates to, and through this relating contributes to transforming reality, so you can't make precise distinctions about the things they do. All the theoretical distinction between reform and revolution is not as significant as was thought in the past...

Now a few words on the question of efficientism.

This is a question that people work out for themselves. I come from a culture and a way of thinking that could be defined efficientist, I was born in an efficientist atmosphere, I come from the school of efficientism. Then I convinced myself that this gets you nowhere. I convinced myself... theoretically (maybe in practice I am still the same, but at least in



theory I can see the difference) that not all the actions one carries out necessarily obtain instant results. That is fundamental. It is important to understand this for many reasons, first of all because there is a tendency, especially among revolutionaries, to present the bill, and let's not forget that revolutionaries are greedy, they are exacting creditors. They are very quick to rig up the *ghigliottine*, they don't wait for anyone. This is something terrible. In fact, what is the *ghigliottine* of the revolutionary? It is the consequence of efficientism, because it reaches a certain point then begins to... I read something recently concerning the stupor caused by of Lenin's writings. Many are shocked because Lenin ordered the peasant proprietors to be killed. That didn't surprise



me at all. The killing of peasant proprietors is quite normal when done in the name of revolutionary efficientism. Either one is surprised at everything to do with efficientism, or one doesn't wonder at reading something of the sort because it is quite normal, a logical consequence of the choices made previously. If one wants to reach given objectives, there are certain costs, that is the concept of efficientism.

The question of efficientism concerns how to set out a struggle correctly, for example the struggle against the prison institutions that hang over each and every one of us to a certain extent. My grandfather used to say, "We all own a brick of the prison". "We have a brick each", he used to say. Not that he un-



derstood much about prison, but it was a well known Sicilian proverb at the time. So, let's make prison become part of our whole intervention in reality, in intermediary struggles. The latter are the struggles that we carry out without expecting any great results because they will probably be recuperated, or because they are circumscribed. If these struggles are set out correctly, however, they always give some kind of result in a way that is different to efficientism. I mean, if social struggles are properly set out they reproduce themselves. And how can they be set out properly? First of all by getting away from the question of the delegate and the expectation of any outside support; in other words, by self-managing them. Then, they obviously shouldn't



be carried out in accordance with the precise deadlines that are fixed in the laboratories of power, so they must start off from a different way of seeing things, from a logic of permanent conflictuality. These two concepts, self-management and permanent conflictuality, are then combined with a third: the absence of the need for immediate visibility.

The effectiveness of a struggle does not come from a utopian vision of reality, but from the real possibility of setting it out in a way that eliminates any possibility of its being transformed into quantity and getting quantitative results.

This is possible. In fact, if we think about it, it is always possible. We often make the mistake of wanting to circumscribe the struggle in order to be



better understood. By intervening in something specific such as the factory for example it is easy to see the characteristics: the struggle for wage increases, holding on to jobs, fighting pollution at work, and so many other things, and we don't see how prison can fit in to that, because we think that people wouldn't understand us as well if we were to widen the argument.

In itself the struggle, let's say in a factory, is always an intermediate one. How might such a struggle end up? At best one would reach the original objective, the workers would save their jobs, then everything would be recuperated. The struggle is recuperated, the bosses find an alternative to redundancy money, they find an alternative to danger-



ous work, they find further investment to improve conditions, etc. This kind of situation satisfies us, and in fact it is all right from a revolutionary point of view if the initial conditions of timing, permanent conflictuality, self-management of the struggle and everything else, were maintained throughout. But it is no longer satisfying if, in the name of efficiency, we prevent ourselves from including prison in it. Because for me the question of prison must be present in all the struggles we carry out—like any other aspect of the revolutionary discourse. And if we think about it, it is possible to do something of the kind. When we don't, it is only in the name of efficiency, because we think that we won't be understood or that we might seem dangerous, so we



prefer to avoid the question of prison.

A few words now on the abolitionist position. Bear in mind that I am not all that well prepared on the subject, first of all because I don't agree with the abolitionist position as I understand it, so I might leave something out. If what I say turns out to be lacking, well, correct me. I was saying, I don't agree with the abolitionist position, not because I want prisons (of course) but because I don't agree with a position that wants to abolish part of a whole that cannot be dissected. In other words, I don't think that it's possible to talk about abolition as opposed to attack. In other words, I don't think that it's possible to propose a platform to abolish one aspect of a context that is organically inseparable. I don't agree



with proposals to abolish the judiciary, because for me such proposals don't make sense; or to abolish the police for that matter. That doesn't mean that I'm in favour of the judiciary or the police. In the same way, I don't agree with the abolition of the State, only its destruction. And not only do I agree to that but I am ready to act now towards such an end, whenever that is, even if it is extremely improbable in the short term. I mean, I am ready to do something, and can discuss what to do in terms of attack against this or that specific aspect of the State, and so also against prison.

In other words, as I see it the problem needs to be turned over. It is not a question of abolishing a part of the State, such as prison for example, but of destroying



the State, obviously not completely and all at once, otherwise we would put it off to infinity. It would be like following that famous direction in history that is moving towards anarchy in any case, so we would end up doing nothing, waiting for this anarchy to come about by itself. On the contrary, I am prepared to do something today, right away, even against a part of the total institution “State”, so also against prison, the police, the judiciary, or any other of the essential components of the State. This is the concept that I wanted to make clear.

What do these ideas actually correspond to? Let’s spend another couple of minutes (don’t get restless, I swear I won’t bore you much longer). If you think about it carefully, the idea of the



abolition of prison comes from quite a precise theoretical context, which frankly I don't know, but something I do know a bit more about was born alongside it. In America at the present time a number of universities are working on the question of the transformation of democracy within general philosophical ideas, but also in sociological theory. There are various American thinkers, the most famous of whom is Nozick, who have examined the concept of a communitarian life without sanctions, without sentences, and without any instruments of repression. Why are they taking up this problem? Obviously because these enlightened people realise that the democratic structure as we know it cannot go on for long and they will have to find another



solution. They need to look and see how communities could emerge without certain elements that are natural to the existence of the State such as prison, the police, State control, etc.. This debate is not something marginal, it is at the centre of political and philosophical ideas in American universities. And in my opinion abolitionism, correct me if I'm wrong, could be taken up by this movement. But this is a question that needs to be gone into by someone who knows more about it than me, I don't want to say any more on the subject.

Let's say that this kind of problem, especially in theorists like Nozik—there are also others but their names escape me at the moment—is an indication of some of the practical needs of the man-



agement of power. Evidently the historical model of democracy, for example Tocqueville's book, is no longer acceptable. That is not the democracy we're talking about. Other structures are required today. Take a country like China. How will the future democracy of China be able to base itself on a model such as Tocqueville's? How could a parliament with twenty six thousand members function, for example? Impossible. They must find another way. And they are working in that direction. We can also see a few signals here in Italy, in a different sense. Institutional transformations, as they say, that are the expression of the generalised malaise of democracy. But also men of letters who seem far from democratic cover-ups such as Fou-



cault have given their contribution to the perfectibility of prison and a rationalisation of the institutional structure.

Concerning Foucault, we could say that, at least as far as I know given that I know his work on the history of madness best, two basic lines of thought run through his work: one relates to overcoming and the other to maintaining a process in act. The result is that this theoretician always leaves something ill-defined. In all his proposals (even that concerning homosexuality, seen as both diversity and normality), it is never clear what he actually opts for. Ambivalence is characteristic of this thinker, and not only him but all those who are trying to keep themselves on an even keel. Basically, for him the prison question



concerns an instrument whose use he is unsure about, he would like to do away with it but does not have anything else to suggest other than putting it in parenthesis. In fact, at a certain point, he gives the example of the *nave des folles*, which was a prison, asylum, orphanage, and rest home for old prostitutes, all at once. He writes that the *nave aux folles* was realised in a few days, that it takes very little time to realise it. At a time when society was expelling individuals who are different (I'm not talking about homosexuals) from certain cities, it put them outside the walls. And these individuals, not knowing what to do, migrated from town to town, so at a given moment they were taken and put on a ship, the ship of mad people. This ship started to sail



from port to port because nobody wanted it. A ship perpetually in movement. At that moment prison was created, as well as the asylum, the orphanage, and rest homes for old prostitutes, because at that time society could no longer tolerate their presence. Certain social functions had disappeared: that of the madman, who in medieval society was seen as one touched by God, and that of the beggar, who in Catholic countries was the object of charity, the basis of Catholic christianity, don't forget. With the development of Protestantism, the beggar becomes an object of capture, so had to be held separate. When society can no longer use him, the figure of the beggar becomes superfluous. He disappears as the receiver of charity to become a prisoner. Today,



this society no longer needs prison, the “thing” prisoner must disappear. How do you do that? By taking a ship and putting all the prisoners on it? But “the thing” prisoner does not disappear when the ship becomes a prison, in the way that the French did with those from the Paris Commune who were deported: they put them into pontoons, boats moored at Le Havre, and people stayed in them for five or six years, prisoners in a floating prison. Now society no longer needs prisons, as some enlightened social theorists are saying, so let’s transfer the prisoners to another social institution. That would be the project seen from the abolitionist point of view. And here Foucault’s discourse turns to perfection.

That’s what I wanted to say. Now let’s



come back to the question of attack for a moment. I am always for the specific attack. The specific attack is important, not only for the results that it produces, that we can see before our eyes... (None of us can claim to be functionalist, because if we were to fall into that contradiction we wouldn't do anything at all). So, first prisons need to be understood, because we can't do anything if we don't understand the reality we want to fight. Then they have to be made comprehensible to others. Then they need to be attacked. There's no other solution. They must be attacked as such. These attacks contain nothing of the great military operations that some imagine. I have always thought of these attacks as a day out in the country. One says to



oneself, “I feel hemmed in today, in this anarchist place, (frankly I find them a bit depressing), and I want to go for a walk. Let’s not stay shut up in this place, let’s go out for a walk”. By that, I don’t mean a student-like attitude, because that’s stupid, but let’s just say without too much drama; it’s always possible to go for a walk in the country, and it’s not bad for your health.. And without spending too much time discussing things and transforming a day in the country into a kind of crusade against all oppressors past, present and future. No, something pleasurable, a day in the country is an activity that must also give us joy, but it is also something specific.

But prisons should also be attacked in the context of the struggle in gener-



al, that is, in the course of any struggle that we manage to undertake. And this is something that we have been saying for about ten years. No matter what we are doing, or what we are talking about, we must make prison a part of it, because prison is essential to any discourse. When we are talking about living areas, health, etc, we must find a way, and there is one, to include prison in what we are saying, denouncing all attempts to muffle its potential to disturb social peace.

Bear in mind that prison is an element in movement, as we have seen, it is not something static and finite. For the enemy, prison is an element of disturbance. They are all always thinking about what they can do to solve the problem of prison. Now, their problem



of prison must become our problem and we must think about it during the struggles we carry out, if we carry them out. All this, of course, while awaiting the next insurrection. Because in the case of insurrection it will be enough to open up the prisons and destroy them for ever.

Thank you.



But the totality of prison is not simply a place, it is also a condition, the antithesis of which is freedom. By the same token, the absence of freedom is prison and only when we perceive the latter as our own condition, realising that it is just a question of degree, will we be able to enter the destructive dimension completely, without measure. Only if we combine empathy with projectuality, disgust for the institution and its putrid essence with hatred for the invisible shackles that bind us all, will we be capable of divesting ourselves of the viscid altruism that dams up the free-flowing energy of revolt. Prison is not a domain reserved for Specialists such as those who have done time themselves or have a particular rapport with individual prisoners, it is the underlying reality of everyday life, each and every discourse of capital taken to its logical conclusion.

